



Committee on **HOMELAND SECURITY** Chairman Michael McCaul

Opening Statement

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Statement of Chairman Michael McCaul (R-TX) Committee on Homeland Security

“Combating Human Trafficking in Our Major Cities”

“We are here today in the heart of Houston; a metropolitan area of nearly 6 million people. This city has a thriving international community, the second busiest port in the country, and is a major center for commerce not far from the Mexican border. It is known for hosting high profile events including the Super Bowl in 2017. Sadly, many of the things that make Houston an attractive place to live and do business also make it a major hub for the tragic business of human trafficking.

In this city, and many other cities across the United States, women and children, some not even in their teens, are held against their will and forced into prostitution rings. Children, who should be learning in school as we sit here, are also held captive and forced into manual labor along with their parents, in order to satisfy exorbitant illegal debts to traffickers that they can never hope to repay. Some are brought into the United States from abroad with the promise of freedom and opportunity only to be forced into modern-day slavery. As a father of five children, I cannot imagine that situation.

However, many are American citizens. They live in difficult conditions – some are abandoned or homeless or runaways – and they trust the first person who offers them a way out. Often this person is a trafficker, a person that is an expert on detecting vulnerability, and a master at exploitation. Human trafficking is emerging in epidemic proportions throughout the United States and the world. While victims might not be physically imprisoned, they are trapped in deplorable conditions through force, fraud or coercion that can make escape seem impossible.

As the fastest growing criminal industry, it is generating billions of dollars for its perpetrators every year. Hundreds of thousands of American children have become victims of human trafficking. In Texas, the Office of the Attorney General reported that between 2007 and 2012, it identified almost 700 human trafficking related incidences, involving almost 800 victims. Yet even with statistics like these, it still comes as a surprise to many people just how prevalent and close to home human trafficking has become.

Today, however, there is hope. One of our witnesses today entered the world of sex trafficking at age 12. Now, decades later, she is working to rescue girls in the same situation.

The Houston area has identified the problem and is making great strides towards prevention and eradication of trafficking. The Human Trafficking Rescue Alliance was formed in 2004 to bring together a range of law enforcement and victim service partners that traditionally would not have the opportunity to work together. In 2003, Texas was one of the leading states to enact a robust state trafficking law and has recently formed a task force to combat trafficking and rescue and restore those that fall victim to it.

At the Federal level, the Human Smuggling and Trafficking Center serves as a clearinghouse for all information related to human smuggling and trafficking. The Department of Homeland Security's lead investigative unit is within Immigration and Customs Enforcement. In 2010, DHS formed the Blue Campaign, a combined effort to provide enhanced public awareness, training, victim assistance, and criminal investigations. DHS, the Department of Justice, and the State Department have collaborated with Mexican law enforcement counterparts on the U.S./Mexico Human Trafficking Bilateral Enforcement Initiative. Through this initiative, both governments have developed high-impact bilateral investigations and prosecutions aimed at dismantling international human trafficking networks.

Despite this collaboration, human trafficking is still far too prevalent and requires a coordinated effort from every available organization and resource to fight the problem. I am proud to co-sponsor Congressman Ted Poe's End Sex Slavery Act and his Justice for Victims of Trafficking Act. These bills will address a number of gaps in human trafficking laws and provide much needed support to victims.

I am grateful for the survivors who have bravely agreed to share their story, and I look forward to hearing from our other witnesses on their experiences in combating human trafficking. It is my hope that with the help of your testimony, we will raise awareness about this issue and identify solutions that will have a significant impact on human trafficking in Houston and throughout the nation."

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